

# *Research on the Femininity under Social Gaze*

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**Abstract:** Because of the shifting position of women in society, attitudes toward femininity have changed rapidly over the last century. This paper discusses the performance of femininity from the social perspective of women and men. In today's rapid development of feminism, people have different attitudes towards femininity. These different views stem from their different positions and educational backgrounds. This paper uses the literature research method and quantitative research. It also explores the distinction between traditional and authentic femininity, the confusion these concepts create for women, the advantages and disadvantages of traditional femininity, and modern women's acceptance or rejection of these views. Additionally, the paper considers men's perspectives on both traditional and modern femininity. The conclusion of this paper is that the existence of traditional femininity is not unnecessary. The existence of these qualities is not wrong, and many of them are beautiful, and they are also the beauty of women.

**Keywords:** Femininity, male gaze, society's expectation, objectification, feminism.

## 1. Introduction

With the development of women's status, societal attitudes toward traditional femininity have increasingly evolved. Although traditional femininity has long been a standard, it has often been viewed as potentially shameful within a patriarchal society, even when considered necessary for women. In recent years, one of the most popular ideas is that women should not be limited to traditional femininity, and men should not be ashamed of the femininity they have. Although more and more people are beginning to write papers on feminism, there are still some gaps in women's views on femininity and social women's and men's views on it. This paper uses the literature research method and quantitative research. The issues explored in this study aim to help people recognize the advantages and disadvantages of both traditional and modern femininity. It seeks to empower women to better understand their gender, enhance their self-awareness, and resist the constraints of traditional societal prejudices. Additionally, it aims to deepen men's understanding of femininity, encouraging them to embrace feminine qualities without shame, thereby allowing them to align more authentically with their inner selves.

## **2. Traditional Femininity**

### **2.1. Society's Expectations for Women**

In ancient society, the expectations placed on women were often rooted in altruism, leading to an emphasis on altruistic forms of femininity, such as virtue, gentleness, or cleverness, primarily benefiting their fathers or husbands. The expectation of women was often characterized by altruism, so most of the femininity advocated was altruistic, such as virtuous and gentleness or cleverness, whose beneficiaries were often their father or husband. Carol Gilligan said, "The real social problem is that women have not had the opportunity to get male experience or character traits, but that society has not appreciated and rewarded the different values in women's character traits." [1] Many men will claim that women are only suitable for staying in the kitchen and at home, because they need their female relatives to cook and do housework to make their own homes more tidy. In fact, in a patriarchal society, women are the object of satisfying men's desires. Women should load and accept men's desires, imaginations and needs. Therefore, society at large requires women to address the desires and needs of men, as well as the demands of social reproduction.

### **2.2. How Does Society Train Women**

"Women in a patriarchal society have been in a marginalised 'other' situation for a long time." [2] Society usually uses the expectations to domesticate women, such as using the stereotype that women are not good at science to train women to participate only in more alternative and low-ranking writing work. Similarly, society may belittle women's professional abilities to encourage them to remain at home. Societies in different periods have different behaviors for domesticating women. Before the women's movement, most societies domesticated women by letting them behave quietly, stay at home and not work outside, and take care of their husbands and children. During this time, society's response to women who did not conform to these expectations was often intimidation, exemplified by the witch hunts of the 18th century. Single women who worked outside the home or otherwise defied societal norms were often put to death to serve as a warning to others.

With the advancement of women's status in modern society, this domestication is often carried out in a more secret way. Usually, society's domestication of women often begins very early. From childhood, girls are encouraged to play games like house or dress-up, while boys are steered toward activities like building or playing with cars. Girls are taught to be obedient and considerate, and avoid making others uncomfortable—concepts not equally emphasized for boys. When men grow up, they are more taught to be ambitious, competitive and determined to win. When women start school, they will say that women are born with a lack of logical thinking and are not good at studying science, even if this has never been scientifically proven. In the process of growing up, they will instill a very important concept of appearance in her, making them lose their subjectivity as human beings and objectify themselves. In these unconscious and subtle changes, in the concept of girls, women have gradually become secondary sex. The important things for women are often ornamental and altruism. This makes many women lose their self-worth and pursue external values.

## **3. Male Perspective of Femininity**

### **3.1. Male Gaze on Women**

Todd McGowan mentioned in his "The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan" [3] that the gaze functions as the "object petit a" in the visual field, representing unsatisfying desires. When a man stares at a woman, he often corresponds to a desire he cannot satisfy. This is why men's requirements for women are basically for their future wives, such as being virtuous, obedient and gentle. Even the

first reaction to meeting a strange woman is whether it is appropriate to consider her to be his future wife. These characteristics show the symbolic objectification of women encouraged by men in a patriarchal society. At the same time, in this social climate, it is difficult for most men to see women as people with a true sense of independence and equals with them. This contempt for another gender can easily make them lose their impartiality, and this gaze is also a manifestation of the imbalance of rights. In the past 100 years, under the influence of patriarchal society, the center of power has often leaned towards men, and this gaze that makes women lose their subjectivity often represents the power of men, and people who truly realize this are more reluctant to give up this power, making them both the observers and those who fear being observed by others.

### **3.2. Men's Disgust and Fear of Femininity**

Most of the time, men are disgusted or even rejected by femininity. When a man shows femininity, other men will show disgust or rejection of him, because they think that traditional femininity is not shameful in men, which is of course a potential misogyny. This disgust is rooted in a fear of men's femininity because they worry that more men will adopt the femininity they dislike. They will be afraid of becoming the people they hate, and they are more afraid that these people will become the majority or even all of men in the future. They know that society uses its femininity to domesticate women to achieve the goal of objectification, which is why they are afraid that they will also be objectified. But at the same time, they also ignore the beautiful parts of natural women in femininity, such as compassion, carefulness and friendliness. In patriarchal societies, these characteristics are often not recognized, which also brings trouble to some men with this natural femininity. This is exactly in line with Karen Honey's theory of uterine jealousy. Many male behaviors come from men's jealousy of women's fertility, which leads to men's demeaning of women as psychological compensation. Further, she hypothesized that this inferiority may make some women want to leave their femininity.

## **4. Female's Perspective of Femininity**

### **4.1. Women's Acceptance of Traditional Femininity**

Nowadays, many women are still in a state of acceptance of traditional femininity. For example, the resurgence of the "trad wife" culture in North America over the past two years illustrates that some women still yearn for the femininity of earlier eras, a trend that is also linked to the economic downturn of recent years. Some women may even feel that returning to the role of a housewife could alleviate their stress to some extent. And many of them will feel that traditional femininity has a certain degree of correctness, because it is the product of thousands of years of cultural iterations. However, traditional femininity is actually the result of centuries of societal domestication of women. Nowadays, many people say that gender equality means that both men and women should shine in their respective areas of expertise, but their definition of their respective fields is that men work hard outside and women work at home, and they say this precisely because traditional femininity is more suitable for the role of caregivers. The reason for this phenomenon is that in the value system of the patriarchal society, women will face a sense of "worthlessness". The evaluation of women's subjectivity in the feminist society is blank. The focus tends to be on whether women fulfill their objectified roles, rather than on the value women create and contribute to society through their agency in significant fields. When some women abandon traditional femininity, they find that there is no value system to measure their value, leading to feelings of panic and unease. As a result, they may revert to accepting traditional femininity.

## 4.2. Women's Rejection of Traditional Femininity

As psychologist Karen Honey said [4], the psychological conflict experienced by women is the traditional female role of loving, appreciating, and serving their husbands. However, she pointed out that women can also create achievements through their careers. More and more women are no longer willing to be limited to traditional femininity. Nowadays, the rise of feminism has led many women to feel ashamed or even disgusted by traditional femininity, viewing it as anti-feminist or demeaning to women [5].

## 5. Conclusion

This paper believes that the existence of traditional femininity is not unnecessary. Although these traits are very altruistic, the existence of these qualities is not wrong, and many of them are beautiful, and they are also the beauty of women. While it is true that contemporary society may be less inclined to encourage traditional femininity, this does not mean that it is something solely to be resisted or rejected. It represents how society views women, and also represents women's perception of themselves. This paper asserts that no one should be bound by expectations of femininity—whether traditional or not. A limitation of this paper is the insufficient collection of data and lack of references to existing literature in the same field, leading to a weaker argument in discussions of femininity. Future research will focus on feminism and women's development and achievements in various fields, as well as how personal identity as women impacts their self-perception.

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